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ABSTRACT

The late 1970s can be characterized as an era of practical concerns in civic education. There is a trend toward useful applied learning which can be evaluated by the actions or skills it produces. Current civic education programs are similar to curriculum reform efforts of the 1930s in that they are committed to educating citizens to function effectively in the political world. However, today's projects have specific civic performance outcomes, such as registering vote, serving on a jury, obtaining a driver's license, and circulating a petition. Such practical skills are useful, but they alone do not assure effective democratic citizenship. Practical skills must be related to an understanding of democratic philosophy and political and social knowledge. Unfortunately, the current emphasis on action is evident even in the way that intellectual goals are defined. Civic knowledge in its current mode of practicality must be quantitatively assessable by school administrators, state department evaluators, and local and state taxpayers. The author recommends that the learning of intellectual and participatory skills should be generated from the school environment. By studying the structure of authority within the school and the social-political milieu of school clubs and classes, students can gain an understanding of political relationships and develop a sense of public interest. (Author/AV)

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Civic Education: Minding Our Goals and Objecti es*

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In the late seventies we are experiencing an era of very practical concerns in civic education. The self-appointed and publically appointed watchdogs of American education, and many education professionals as well, are calling for a reexamination of the role of schools in the practical citizenship education of young people. The trend is toward "useful" applied learning which is evaluated by the visible actions or "skills" it produces.

This is not the first time in recent history that applied or practical civic education has been popularized as a goal for public education. The thirties and forties produced similar concerns. Some of those old guidelines for practical reform have returned today. Like the ghosts of ancient wise men they smile, point their boney fingers toward the schools and raise their creaky voices to tell us what citizen skills should be taught and how.[1]

They return in different trappings, however. Today the old practical reform proposals for civic education are clothed in the sophistication of technological advancement and the experiences of nearly two decades of government funded research, innovation and renovation. The old proposals for civic education are now equipped with modern contact lenses

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shaped by the rise to prominence of behaviorism in education since the fifties; the heavy residue of concern over political alienation left over from the Vietnam War years and renewed by Watergate; the feelings of citizen frustration over the bureaucratic red tape which separates individuals from their government and its services; increasing demands for economic accountability in a period of unrelenting inflation; and in the social studies, the recent gradual rejection of the scholarly goals drawn from the social sciences which guided research and development in the sixties and early seventies.

Current civic education programs are similar to curriculum reform efforts of the thirties in that they are committed to educating citizens who function effectively in the political world. However, today's project's have specific performance outcomes guided by a list of specific competencies ascribed to citizens with the ability to "get things done" in the civic arena, models who can make the social-political system respond to them.[2]

Civic educational development projects tend to be concerned with educating students for practical proficiencies -- registering to vote, serving on a jury, obtaining a driver's license, circulating a petition. While learning methods of conducting and participating in orderly group meetings contributes to public expression, and skill in identifying and prodding the proper government agency for a needed service is undoubtedly useful, these practical competencies along do not assure effective democratic citizenship. Achieving proficiency in the use of interest group tactics to win public support is undoubtedly an action skill. But we must ask: Action skills for what? Competence for what? Proficiency in participation is a worthwhile aim but not if it is unallied to goals

which are grounded in democratic philosophy and political and social knowledge.

The current emphasis on action and practice is evident even in the way that intellectual goals are defined. Civic knowledge in its current mode of practicality must be measurable and quantitatively assessable by school administrators, state department evaluators and local and state taxpayers. The proof of knowledge is "productivity, and the measure of productivity these days is a list of numerical descriptors of observable behavioral changes. Knowledge of a great ancient culture or of a political philosophical treatise must be displayed in a series of demonstrations which, if we are not careful, may be checked off like so many rope-tying tricks. Even goals of thought process development, such as comparative analysis of the principles expressed in several written works, are constricted by the demand for practical behavioral output which supposedly assures the worthiness of the process. But, teachers and designers of curriculum materials often feel constrained to couch their purposes in terms of numerous visible behaviors without tying them to broader more general goals related to life in a democratic society.

Applied in moderation the practice of specific goal definition is valuable because it does force educators to think about the consequences of learning. However, the full scale fracturing of civic education goals into long lists of highly specific behavioral objectives cannot but cause teachers and curriculum developers alike to lose sight of the whole for the bits and pieces. Even leading proponents of criterion-referenced evaluation of educational objectives warn us that we must take care to set down our general purposes and reference the conceptual content areas of specific learning outcomes in order to avoid getting lost in vast listings of behaviors.[3]

Civic education in any society must have goals consistent with the principles undergirding its political institutions and its overall political culture. In a democratic society specific philosophical commitments must be examined and a broad theoretical framework must be established as the backdrop of civic reasoning and civic action. This theoretical context for learning both intellectual and participatory skills should be generated not only from the formal curriculum plan and the social studies classroom, but from the general school environment as well. Given the evidence we have that young people learn their civic attitudes rather fortuitously from their surroundings, it is logical that an awareness of the school's impact on student learning of such norms as tolerance, compromise and trust should guide civic education goals.[4]

For example, numerous action-oriented, measurable, behavioral objectives could guide teachers and students toward classroom and community learning activities which would contribute to an understanding of social justice. But, unless these experiences are referenced to or related to the constructs of social justice in the American democracy, an important aspect of civic education is not realized. Likewise, experiences in the social-political milieu of the school -- in the halls, classes, club meetings, in the lunchroom, etc. -- can contribute to their understanding of social justice as the principle is demonstrated in the social-political institution of the school and compared to the large society.

It should be remembered, however, that the school environment, particularly the classroom, provides neither a theoretical and non practical model of the American polity.[5] The teacher holds authority not by popular sovereignty but by a grant of formal power from the school board, an outside source. Nevertheless, students may examine this essentially bureaucratic model of authority and compare it to that of the representative

democracy. Furthermore, as Dreeban argues, the bureaucratic setting of the school institution can provide experiences whereby students learn to submerge personal identity, understand another person's position and empathize.[6] This, he points out, is a prime requirement for participation in a democracy. Here we have specific behaviors and a general goal achieved by transfer and rather than by practice alone.

Definition of the broad general goals of civic education is clearly needed now to counterbalance an overemphasis on "product orientation" and the near obsession with lengthy lists of behavioral objectives. This is not to suggest that we disregard observable changes as major measures of civic knowledge, but rather, it is to stress that as civic educators we must define larger purposes than <u>just</u> being sure that Johnny can list in writing the names of three out of four of the last Florida governors, or that June is able to write her congressman a two-paragraph letter or that Roberto can use a voting machine.

Perhaps the existing preoccupation with behavioral, active aims for the civic curriculum is but one symptom of what Sennett describes as "the fall of public man,"[7] whereby the individual defines his identity in some small niche of the private world to escape involvement in the state and the society. Sennett sees our current immersion in personal feelings, personal privacy, our psyches and ourselves as a means of escaping the formal obligations of public life. "Most citizens," he writes, approach dealings with the state "in a spirit of resigned acquiescence."

Sennett's analysis of the civic condition of our era points up the need to attend to the theoretical context for civic learning. Public life should be more than unpleasant formal obligation. And civic education should seek to develop young citizens who feel adequate to public

life because they have public interests and a commitment to the expression of their public interests in the society.

When we have constructed the philosophical beacons which shape broad purposes for civic education -- such as the understanding of political responsibility, trust, tolerance, social justice, and interdependence -- which will guide us in the narrow, dark tunnels of numerous specific behavioral objectives, then I think our civic education goals and objectives will be viable for educating public citizens for the eighties.

Notes

[1]Howard E. Wilson, Education for Citizenship. New York; McGraw-Hill, 1938; The Social Studies Curriculum, Department of Superintendence Fourteenth Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1936; I. James Quillen and Lavone A. Hanna, Education for Social Competence. New York: Scott, Foresman, 1948. John U. Michaelis, Social Studies for Children in a Democracy. New York: Prentice Hall, 1960; American Association of School Administrators, Education for American Citizenship. Thirty-second Yearbook, 1954.

[2]David Mathews, "The Office of Citizen: An Imperative for Education," Phi Delta Kappan, September, 1976, pp. 70-71; Dan Conrad and Diane Hoden, "Learning and Earning Citizenship Through Participation," in Building Rationales for Citizenship Education (J. P. Shaver, ed.) Arlington, VA: National Council for the Social Studies, 1977; Fred Newmann, Education for Citizen Action: Challenge for Secondary Curriculum. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1975

[3]N.E. Gronlund, Preparing Criterion-Referenced Tests for Classroom Instruction, New York: McMillan Company, 1973, 3-7; W. James Popham. "A Competency Based High School Completion Program." National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, February 1978, 101-105.

[4]John Dewey, The School and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915; Harold Entwistle, Political Education in a Democracy. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.

[5]Mary Anne Raywid, "The Democratic Classroom Mistake or Misnomer," Theory Into Practice Vol. 15, No. 1 (Feb, 1976) '37-46.

[6]Robert Greetan, On What is Learned In School, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1968.

[7]Richard Sennett. The Fall of Public Man, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.